

Boon of orange on plain land

SHYKH SERAJ

Dear readers, a few days back I went to Chapatola in Jhenidah's Maheshpur upazila. For the past few months, I had plans to visit this place and there was a special reason to do so. I want to bring in front of you a fruit farmer who has done remarkably well. His name is Rafiqul Islam, who has cultivated orange on plain land for the first time, to the best of my knowledge. Seven years back, I featured orange cultivation from Moulvibazar's Juri upazila. A man named Anwar did the cultivation on the hills. As far as I know, Rafiqul is the first to cultivate orange on the plain land. Rafiqul is a very active person and he has been contacting me to visit his orchard for some years. And, he's an avid viewer of my programme, Hridoye Mati O Manush. Finally, I could make it happen. Rafiqul collected the orange saplings from abroad. Today, you'll get to know the amazing orange orchard of Rafiqul. He is cultivating some other crops as well. He has cultivated maize on four bigha of land.

I reached Chapatola, starting from Jashore at 4:00am. Rafiqul was waiting for me. He was so glad to see me. We went straight to his orchard. Oranges could be seen from a far distance.

"It's so good to see you," said Rafiqul hugging me.

"Look at your wonderful orchard," I replied.

"I have been waiting for you for a long time," he said.

"I'm sorry, but finally I could manage it Rafiqul," I replied entering his orchard.

Ripe oranges are all over. Colourful and large enough with deep green leaves. At times I felt the oranges are even more than the leaves. I could barely believe my eyes.

"How big is your orchard?"

"Five bigha (2.002 acres),"

"How many orange trees are here?"

"About 140."

"Do you have malta?"

"Yes, there are 500 malta trees."

"What about this one," I asked Rafiqul touching another variety of orange.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



Shykh Seraj at Rafiqul Islam's orange orchard at Chapatola village in Jhenidah's Maheshpur upazila.

PHOTO: HRIDOEY MATI O MANUSH

I picked one orange from his tree. I tasted and tell you what, it was so juicy and sweet. I really felt proud of Rafiqul who has done a tremendous job in producing orange on a plain land with such quality. In this great occasion, I was remembering Reboti Sikder, who did a fantastic job back in 2016 by producing sweet malta in Pirojpur's Dakatia. Rafiqul is researching with different varieties of oranges here. And most of his experiments went successful. Mandarin variety is comparatively smaller and has a reddish shade. This variety was produced at a great extent, says Rafiqul.

Bangladesh has been producing various types of fruits. We, however, spend a lot of foreign currency to buy apples and oranges every year. Rafiqul believes within two to three years, Bangladesh will be able to stop importing oranges.

"Our Honourable Prime Minister is very much a farmer-friendly person. If she looks into this matter, we'll definitely shine more," Rafiqul hopes. He also mentioned, if this orchard comes into notice of the Agriculture Minister, things will definitely go even bigger for an even better future.

The story of Rafiqul of turning into an orange farmer from a nursery owner is truly amazing.

"Actually, I was a nursery owner. After watching Reboti Sikder's malta success on Hridoye Mati O Manush, I thought I need to

become a successful farmer, not just a nursery owner," Rafiqul said.

After seeing the programme, Rafiqul wanted to have a malta garden of his own. He started off with guava. So far, he has sold guava worth Tk 10 lakh (USD 11,775). When he went to Darjeeling, he saw many orange trees in high and low lands with huge production. He collected 200 saplings from there. He came back and planted those.

In the meantime, he did some malta and those were giving him good produce. But, looking at the oranges after a couple of months of planting, he became really hopeful.

"However, people told me that growing oranges here is an insane initiative. I only kept on working hard and kept my focus on my work," said Rafiqul.

"But as you can see now, the result is much satisfying and hopeful. I believed that I could also grow foreign varieties of oranges here," added the confident orchard owner.

"Have the traders made any dealing?" I asked.

"They proposed Tk 120 (USD 1.41) per kg. My asking price is Tk 130 (USD 1.53)."

"How many kilograms of oranges do you expect?"

"4,000, and Tk 5,200 (USD 61.23) for every 40 kilograms."

"So, for 4,000 kilograms you're expecting to get Tk 5,20,000 (USD 6,123.02) while expenditure in only Tk 50,000?"

"Yes."

"That's just great!"

Do we have any idea how much orange we import every year?

According to a survey of Chattogram customs, in the fiscal year 2017- 2018, 1,17,170 tonnes of orange and malta have been imported. Each tonne worth Tk 93,000 (USD 1,095.08). It means in total the expense is approximately Tk 1,090 crore (USD 128 million). In the previous fiscal year, 1,02,100 tonnes of orange and malta were imported.

Within a decade, Bangladesh can become

self-dependent in producing oranges and he's extremely hopeful that Bangladesh would be able to export oranges very soon if farmers get the support at the right time, Rafiqul said.

Rafiqul has also produced 30,000 mandarin orange saplings and selling those to other farmers. The one-foot tall sapling costs Tk 150 (USD 1.76) while the two-feet costs Tk 200 (USD 2.35).

Rafiqul's garden is now a dreamland for all the young entrepreneurs of the country. I also met the Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) Rabiu Kabir Pallab and discussed about Rafiqul's orchard.

"As a marginal farmer, he has taken a great risk and built up the garden. We could not imagine this much success in orange cultivation," SAAO Rabiu said.

"How can you help further?" I asked.

"We're always beside the farmers and we're going to help them with advanced technologies," replied Rabiu.

"We have already advised Rafiqul to make his soil more fertile," added Rabiu.

Dear readers, I wish to see Bangladeshi farmers go to the field and make abundant success. And, Rafiqul is just the perfect example of it. He not only wants to meet the demand of local consumption but also looking keenly forward to export. I truly hope and want that the dream of this dedicated, spirited and successful farmer gets fulfilled.

"This is Darjeeling orange," he replied.

"I also have Mandarin orange," he added with a smile on his face.

Rafiqul requested me to pick an orange from his tree.

"I waited for this moment for a long time; it's a dream come true for me," Rafiqul said.



Logs lie scattered in the forest on a government-owned khas land in Paschim Singur area of Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila on Tuesday, bearing testimony to mindless tree felling there while a truckload of logs (inset), allegedly collected from the forest, is being taken for sale.

PHOTO: MINTUDESWARA

Logging puts forest in danger

UNO seizes 100 logs of trees felled at government land in Kulaura

MINTU DESWARA, Moulvibazar

Illegal tree felling poses threat to the forest on a government-owned khas land in Paschim Singur area of Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila.

Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer Farhad Hossain on Tuesday seized around 100 logs of illegally felled trees from the area.

A few people started felling trees there two weeks ago, allegedly with the help of the beat officer of adjacent Baramchal forest, several locals said.

"The gangs are cutting trees in Paschim Singur area, sometime in broad daylight, but villagers dare not say anything as influential people are involved in the act," Saidul Islam Shipon, a resident of Baramchal village in Kulaura upazila, told this correspondent.

As there is huge demand of wood for local

sawmills, they have targeted the forest, he said.

On condition of anonymity, one of the tree looters said usually they make a verbal agreement with the beat officer of adjacent forest after selecting a spot.

The officer gets 40% of the money earned from each truckload of logs. If there is any disagreement regarding the dealings, the forest department begins drives against the illegal tree felling," he said.

Visiting the forest areas in Paschim Singur on Tuesday, this correspondent saw clear evidence of massive tree felling.

There were remains of trees and three huge piles of logs were found near a newly-made road.

Contacted, Ahmed Ali, beat officer of Baramchal forest, termed the allegations

against him as false.

"The area under question does not belong to the forest department. If we receive any information when loggers transport wood, we can seize the wood-laden vehicles. We don't have enough resources to conduct regular drives on the road," he said.

Abdul Karim Kim, executive member of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, said, the forest faces the threat of disappearance due to the illegal tree felling.

Along with official action, social movement is necessary to save the forest, he said.

SM Sajjad Hosen, divisional officer of forest department in Sylhet, told this correspondent, "I wasn't aware of the matter until now. We will conduct an inquiry and take action if the allegations of tree looting are found true."

Woman murdered in Manikganj town

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A woman was murdered in the town yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Mahmuda Begum, 45, wife of Zahirul Islam Aliar of South Sewta area in the town. The couple lived on second floor of their five-storey building.

Police and family members said some miscreants entered the floor around 10:00am and strangled the woman in her room. The murderers also tied hands, legs, eyes and mouth of the victim's daughter Jyoti Akther, 20, and kept her confined to the adjoining room. At the time, Mahmuda's husband Zahirul was feeding pigeons on the roof of the building. After some time, he entered the flat and found his wife unconscious. Mahmuda was later

taken to 250-bed District Hospital where on-duty doctor declared her dead.

Jyoti said three unidentified persons tied her legs, hands, eyes and mouth when she came out from toilet and she was kept confined to a room. She then heard her mother screaming. Later, the miscreants fled the scene. Additional Superintendent of Police Hafizur Rahman said the woman was strangled. The rope was found on the spot. Preliminary investigation showed that it was a pre-planned murder, said the police official.

Officer in-Charge of Manikganj Police Station Rakibuzzaman said the body was sent to the hospital for autopsy. Superintendent of Police (SP) Rifat Rahman Shamim visited the spot. Police were trying to find out motive behind the murder, said the SP.



Seedlings are being sorted out by two female workers at a seedbed in Jujkhola village of Pirojpur Sadar upazila recently. It has been a long tradition in parts of the upazila and its neighbouring Najirpur upazila where women, after finishing their household chores, work alongside men at crop fields.

PHOTO: HABIBURRAHMAN